



Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

جمعية صداقة
كامدن أبوديس

*Promoting human rights and respect for
international humanitarian law*



Youth Ambassadors for Human Rights

<http://yhr09.blogspot.com>

Report of the Youth Visit from Abu Dis in June 2009

Run by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association with Dar Assadaqa, Abu Dis
Supported by Youth in Action (European Union)



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme

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Charity number 1112717

**Letter written by the Palestinian children at their certificate ceremony
in Abu Dis, July 09:**

*Dear everyone who took care of us and helped us
during the visit to London in June*

Greetings to all of you

We are sending you this letter to thank you very much and to show our appreciation for all the brilliant things that you did for us. It is hard to find suitable words to express our feelings about the things you did for us, but we want you to know that we will remember everything, and we will never forget this beautiful trip. We hope that we achieved the things we were responsible for in this visit. We hope that you will keep us the good work for us all

Thank you again,

Zaina, Saja, Ibrahim, Yazan, Enas, Majd, Mohammed and Adam.

“ I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of the project and gained an insight of the difficulties the Palestinians face. I got to understand how the separation affects them and how I would feel if that was to happen to me. I’m so glad I was selected to participate and I think this project should happen annually because it definitely raised the awareness of human rights to many people” **(one of the English children in her visit report)**

- **Project blog:** <http://yhr09.blogspot.com>
- **Photos and reports** from the visit will be put on the Camden Abu Dis website www.camdenabudis.net
- **Look out for the project book and film**, which will be launched in Camden on 15th September and in Abu Dis on 29th September 2009.

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1. Summary

The Youth Ambassadors For Human Rights Project 2009 was run by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association in co-operation with Dar Assadaqa Community Centre in Abu Dis, Palestine. It was a success in terms of its aims. The young people involved enjoyed it thoroughly and learned a huge amount. All went well and the organisers also learned and developed new ideas.

In short, it was a very fruitful exchange that has developed the relationship between our young people, between the two partner organisations, potentially between the schools and youth clubs visited and represented. The project had developed material that can be used in both countries to strengthen future links.

2. Thank you

We would like first to thank Youth in Action for providing the main funding that enabled this exciting project to go ahead.

Beyond that, there are so very many people to thank that it is impossible to list them all in a paragraph or two. We are so grateful to all the individuals and organisations that made this a success.

We raised money that made the visit possible from an appeal to individuals, from fundraising events, from a concert during the visit and from the efforts of the English young people. A full list of organisations that contributed is in the appendix; a big thank you to you all.

We would like formally to thank those from outside CADFA who gave their time to help with the events, including Ambassador Professor Manuel Hassassian, Jean Lambert MEP, Lowkey MC, Velvet Fist, the Saddaqa Duo and of course all of those from the Camden schools and youth clubs who organised such interesting visits for our young people.

Many many thanks to our terrific team of workers and volunteers for their great efforts, whether cooking, driving, speaking, running workshops, making pretend Walls (or all sorts of other things). And of course to the young people and group leaders themselves for throwing themselves into all stages of the project with a commitment and an interest in the lives of others that was truly inspiring.

3. Aims of the exchange

From the project bid to Youth in Action:

This project's "themes are to develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people and to foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries; its themes were learning from each other about the strengths there are in diversity, opposing discrimination, and how this links to respect and human rights.....

" This youth exchange will bring eight young people from Palestine, with three adults, to join a group of eight young people from Britain in Camden, London, for nine days in June 2009. They will work together on the project of becoming youth ambassadors for human rights. They will learn through joint activities during each day, and there will be daily opportunities for group reflection and preparation of the next day's activities.

" Before the exchange, both groups of young people will have a series of meetings. They will prepare information for the partner group about their own culture and lives, which will help to make best use of the exchange visit itself. They will have language lessons. There will be a pre-project planning meeting between group leaders from both countries.

" The beginning of the exchange will consist of group visits and activities and time to reflect through workshops, taped interviews with each other and the construction of a project blog. Participants will learn about their different cultures and explore issues related to social inclusion, discrimination and human rights. They will identify the messages that they want to be giving to other young people.

"They will then have structured opportunities in cross-country pairs to give these messages through talks, writing, and artwork to different youth groups and school groups in Camden, and will also video and evaluate the interactions.

" At the end of the time they will review the best methods together, and material made during the visit will be collected for a CD and booklet that can be used by youth groups and schools in both places."

4. Preparing for the exchange

Planning

We began joint planning for the visit at the beginning of February and the two organisations used email, telephone, Skype to communicate and plan as we have done in previous visits. However, this time we were able to add a planning visit in March, a programme of preparation for the young people in both places and we also introduced the blog for the young people before the visit.

Preparation visit

The planning visit was a very good idea and extremely useful to the smooth running of the young people's visit in June. We were very glad of the time. We thrashed out a common understanding of what we were going to do and why, visited possible places for outings (and ruled some out as not appropriate), did risk assessments for each aspect of the visit and began a process of helping the Palestinian partner, Dar Assadaqa, to develop a child protection policy. We kept to the agenda written in our application and spent a week on doing this properly.

Preparation sessions

Following the preparation visit which brought the organisers together, we began a preparation phase with the young people at both ends. In both Camden and Abu Dis, regular meetings of the young people began to plan for the visit, work on language issues and prepare presentations to show the other group. The Palestinian group prepared dance and drama and the English young people made amendments to the programme (for example, suggesting ice-skating which turned out to be a great success) and did some fundraising towards the project.

We started building our visit blog at this stage. This was earlier than we had planned to do this, but it proved to be a good idea, and helped to build links between the two groups. For example, there was a process of developing a project logo that went back and forth between Camden and Abu Dis. At the suggestion of the young people this led to our making teeshirts for them all and a clear shared ownership of the project.

We were able to use the blog as well as a place to ask questions of both groups of young people at once and to record expectations. We asked each group separately to work on groundrules for the visit, which we then translated and included in our welcome pack.

There were meetings of the project team leaders at both ends to establish common expectations and ways of working. We were able to use our experience of previous exchanges as a starting point and really felt we had gained maturity over time.

We started some video work at this stage and also prepared and translated material for the visit itself: a Welcome Pack in two languages which was used in the visit induction, feedback and final meetings, a Leaders' Pack which was used in our initial meeting of leaders from both sides and then throughout the visit, and translated questions and activity sheets to be used at a number of points during the programme. These materials are included as appendices at the end of this report.

5. The exchange itself

5a Programme planning

During the programme-planning stage, we found that the detailed thought that had gone into the Youth in Action application was very helpful, and we sought to keep to it. During the planning visit, we decided on the detail of outings and visited schools etc, and the reasons for the choice of activities. Changes did occur because of the needs of other organisations (schools, youth clubs) but they were fairly small and included such issues as timing during the week, ways to divide the young people for human rights presentations in the different classes etc.

One aspect that we wanted to keep to was the daily whole-group feedback meetings, but this proved difficult to hold in exactly the form envisaged for a number of reasons: we had a number of evening events, and the Palestinian boys and girls - as well as the English young people- had to return to different parts of the borough. So although we initially rented a meeting room for each evening, for eating, meeting and using computers for the blog and daily reports, we decided before the visit that this would mean too much travelling across the borough, and we made a new plan instead for end-of-the-day meetings following our last day's event.

5b The programme in practice

We were very thorough in working through the programme in advance, and in practice we kept to all parts of it, and everything ran smoothly and punctually.

We were very pleased with the choice and balance of activities for the visit and with the outcomes and learning observed on each day. We feel it went extremely well.

There was only one change to the programme and that could not have been foreseen: the Palestinian ambassador (delegate general*) met the young people at the exhibition opening on the Tuesday evening and was keen to invite them to lunch on the Friday. Both groups of young people were very excited by this so we changed one afternoon's events to enable that to happen.

There were then three versions of the programme: our original plan in the project bid which includes the thinking behind the activities chosen, the programme as given to the participants on the blog and in the Welcome Pack and the final programme which shows the amendment on the Friday afternoon. The final programme is included in the appendix.

5c The human rights project

The chosen project was about human rights; the young people learned about human rights issues in their own country and the other country and worked on ways to communicate about human rights to other groups of young people. The British-Palestinian pairs worked together finding ways to learn and tell others including presentations, drama, questions, and through all the interactions organised as they got to know each other.

Before they met, they did research about the human rights situation in their own countries. They chose human rights and issues related to them and prepared presentations for the other group, which were done on the first “work” day (the Monday) and were very interesting to all of them.

They worked with other groups in schools and youth groups using different methods and taking different roles – All got a chance to present, write, draw, do video, answer questions in discussion. They looked at different ways of presenting human rights, through music, dance, art, photography exhibition, drama, books etc; it was a chance to consider methods and skills as well as to exchange knowledge.

The British young people learned about human rights in Palestine, and the Palestinian young people were amazed by the freedoms they observed in Britain.

The final workshop was a chance to evaluate what had been learned and to work in pairs on material for the book that will be one outcome of the project.

The anticipated aims of the project were met and the results were more than we had hoped for. The project book has become a resource handbook for other young people about human rights and Palestine, incorporating some of the things written by the youth ambassadors’ group but also the material that they needed to have by their side when talking to other young people about these issues.

We think that the book and the DVD (a report of the visit based on videos made during the project) will be useful in schools and youth clubs, and will certainly be greeted with interest by those who met the young people in Camden.

5d Special events

We ran three special events during the project.

Photo exhibition

On the Tuesday evening, the opening of a Camden Abu Dis teachers' photo exhibition, with a related activity for the young people on the exchange.

Concert

On the Friday evening a concert including a range of musicians and a rapper Lowkey Mc who was known to local young people, brought in lots of enthusiasm and increased awareness of the work of the project.

Human rights workshop

On the Saturday, a human rights workshop that was opened by an MEP Jean Lambert, who spoke to the young people about the European Union's approach to human rights before they went on to draw together work they had done during the week and to enjoy a range of creative activities.

The three of these events were not only successful in the terms that we set for them but also very special in themselves, and our only regret and puzzle is that despite a lot of approaches to the local press, they did not get the press coverage they deserved.

6. Practical arrangements

6a Co-ordination:

This was a massive project in terms of co-ordination between dozens of organisations and tens of people, and detailed arrangements benefited enormously from the planning visit and close co-ordination between both teams in the preparation stage. We were very proud of how very well the visit worked out in practice – and the detail of the planning was almost invisible! We concentrated on trying to be very clear in our communication via written systems, info packs and meetings and we did well.

6b The application process

We were concerned to have a fair application process. This was the fourth youth visit that we have organised together involving children from Dar Assadaqa, and we know from previous experience that because this is a very special opportunity for children in Palestine, there can be a lot of anxiety about it, a lot of people who would like the opportunity, and also some pressure and lobbying to give this chance to family members. It was however the first time we had involved Camden children in a project of this sort. We needed school permission to take the English children out of school for a week .

In Palestine, application forms were distributed to the young people in the drama group in the Dar Assadaqa youth club (the drama group had been

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working on a theme of human rights) but we asked for the involvement of the London steering group in the selection of the children from Abu Dis to try to avoid pressure on anyone there. In London, we distributed application forms via schools and youth clubs but the selection was by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association youth links steering group.

We selected the whole group of children according to the criteria below:

We sought children who were seriously interested in the project, showed commitment in the planning sessions, had the appropriate permission.. We wanted to find 4 girls and 4 boys from Camden and 4 girls and 4 boys from Abu Dis; and 4 aged 13-14 and 4 aged 15+ from each place.

We also sought to include children from a number of schools in each place in order to maximise the impact of the project in the longer term.

The young people chosen

The Palestinian group was as planned: 8 young people from Palestine and three group leaders. From London, as well as three group leaders, we accepted extra young people on to the programme, because a number of the young people had exams during that week and needed to miss a day or two of the project. We therefore partnered each Palestinian youngster with one or two English youngsters, and made a programme so that there were equal numbers of English and Palestinian children on every school day, though we invited all of them in evenings and at weekends.

We also ended up with slightly more girls than boys in the English group (we usually had 3 boys and 5 girls as British partners with the 4 and 4 from Palestine), but the one girl who was partnered with a boy had some Arabic and the boy had weaker English than the others, so this was helpful.

6d Partners:

We were very pleased with the arrangement of giving the children from the different countries named partners to work with each other, help each other and take on joint responsibilities. We seem to have found the right partnerships. It worked very well and encouraged special friendships which we hope will last.

6e Training and induction:

Youth leaders met in each place before they came and there was sharing of procedures between the two groups via the internet before the visit. We also held a joint youth leader meeting during the welcome party as soon as the Palestinian young people had arrived. Understandings and methods of working were thus communicated to each other before the two groups met; individuals' roles and responsibilities were made clear and procedures in case of emergency were shared and understood.

Young people were given similar exercises for their preparation meetings in their own countries. When they arrived, there was an induction workshop with

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games and activities from the welcome pack and icebreaking activities in an outdoor first day.

We focused on eliminating uncertainty and all of this worked well.

6f Accommodation and food:

We are very grateful to Maria Fidelis, St Aloysius and Southwell House for finding our guests wonderful accommodation where they were safe and happy.

Many thanks also to a huge team of helpers who cooked, organised and sometimes delivered carried food for the young people – and for all the care they took. It was as always a challenge to find food that always please everyone but most people ate well and happily.

6g Language issues:

Different languages were an interest rather than a problem throughout this project. In London we organised taster Arabic for the English children as part of the preparation meetings and in Palestine there were special English classes twice a week for several months before they came.

By the time the visitors arrived, we knew whose English was stronger or weaker, and we were able to arrange groupings and interpreters on this basis. There were times when the in-country groups were together, but in most activities we encouraged people to work with their partners from the other group, sometimes with help from an interpreter. We translated information and activity sheets so that they were there in both languages and ensured that there was respect for both languages throughout the project: our end-of-project booklet will be bilingual.

All the Palestinian visitors improved their English. Several of the English children were seen trying a word or two of Arabic. One had an Egyptian father and gained the confidence during this visit to try out some Arabic. Two were very helpful because they had some Arabic already and they were very proud to be able to help the others.

7. Outcomes of the exchange

7a Feedback sessions

The two groups of children had separate final feedback sessions in which they could discuss what had happened and do a formal evaluation of the visit. We organised sessions for the parents at which the participants explained what they had been doing and received a certificate for the work done, and we asked the young people to write a report.

We held a debriefing session too for each group of team leaders at which we collected their responses and evaluations, and their ideas for another time.

7b What the young people learned

It is clear from their reports, feedback and final evaluation that all the young people enjoyed this project very much and very much appreciated the opportunity to be part of it. As well as the language they learned, they spoke of how much they had learned from each other about the other country and its culture as well as the themes of respect for human rights and the rule of law were the centre of the project.

The English children learned not only about Palestine but about their own country and its history, about children in their own borough who were different from them, about South Africa under apartheid. Many of them went to parts of London they had never visited before – Many of them were as excited about the outings as the Palestinian children. They also told us that they grew in confidence. One girl for example told us that she had learned that she could now be confident about giving a presentation in front of a large group of children which had previously been very frightening: “I thought, if the Palestinian children can do it in a foreign language, why can’t I do it when it’s my own language?”

The Palestinian group leaders emphasised that for their young people, this was the opportunity of their lives; it gave them a view of the outside world, completely unlike their everyday life in Palestine. The leaders were sure that they would never forget it, and, more, they thought it would stimulate them to higher achievement in education and in their lives.

They appeared to be very keen to stay in touch with each other – within and between countries - and to help to keep links going between their two places.

7c What we learned as organisers

Overall, we were pleased about how this had gone and how a big team including many volunteers had worked seamlessly and effectively. Feedback by the group leaders in London focused on the success of the organisation and logistics, and people felt that it had been “heartwarming” and had a lot of praise for the group of young people.

We did not have a long list of lessons from this particular visit as we had drawn a lot of lessons from experience with international visits in the previous years and were glad of changes that we had made. We did however have some ideas for another time:

Age-groups

One, that in order to be able to pay proper attention to the needs of the younger group it would be better to arrange different visits for the different age-groups of under-16s and 16+ .

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Places to stay

Secondly, we found having everyone together for evening meeting-times a challenge because participants were going back to stay in different places. But the meetings were important. Perhaps one idea for another time would be to have all the participants, English and Palestinian, staying in one place? We will have to see how this could work.

Programme

Next time we should build in clear time off for the Palestinian group leaders, to allow them some time to rest;

We should consider the possibility of the Palestinian children visiting the homes of some of the English participants to see what English homes are like.

7d Evaluations

The reports by the participants are attached; they are all very positive about the effects on them and the people around them and they are full of hope that we will do further projects of this sort.

Some of the English and parents told us how pleased they were that their children had had the opportunity to take part in this project.

Schools and youth clubs in Abu Dis reported very positively about the meetings between their students and the visitors, sometimes because the arrangements were good and sometimes because they appreciated the behaviour of both lots of children. Here is one comment:

We went home talking about how we found them all so kind and friendly and that they seemed to have none of the slightly mocking thing that is really popular in some of the groups we meet (and with some of our kids at group)...We also talked about how the Palestinians were really kind to the baby; one of the boys just picked him up and hugged him...that doesn't happen often with young men who aren't related to him and it was so nice!

Team members gave a glowing evaluation. They had ideas about new projects, contributed to the ideas for another time written above, but overall they wanted us to do another youth exchange next year if we can raise the money.

8. Wider effects of the project

8a Young people involved,

The project itself included over a thousand people, because it brought the Youth Ambassadors to many schools and to youth clubs and special events.

Here are estimated numbers of young people directly involved in the project either by listening to the presentations, taking part in workshops or otherwise working with the young people:

In Britain

Youth ambassadors main beneficiaries	24
Haverstock School	160
Camden School for Girls	200
Acland Burghley School	200
Edith Neville School	60
Gospel Oak School	30
Hampstead School	100
South Camden Community School	20
Maria Fidelis School	200
Families in focus Youth Club	15
Woodcraft Folk	25
Calthorpe Centre Youth Club	20
Tuesday, Friday and Saturday public events: many who came were also included in the numbers above. Estimate of the number NOT included above, from all three,	50

In Palestine:

Dar Assadaqa youth group (young people who did not come to Britain but were involved in preparation and feedback activities)	30
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The main participants came from the following schools and we expect there will be opportunities for them to use the work they did within those schools:

Abu Dis Boys' School	Hampstead
Abu Dis Girls' School	Haverstock
Acland Burghley	Maria Fidelis
Arab Institute	South Camden
Camden School for Girls	Community School

In addition we have been told that many of the young people who attended the various sessions were impressed and interested and have been telling families and friends about what they did and what they heard.

8b Wider community interest

The project built on earlier links between the two places, Camden and Abu Dis, and it has strengthened those links. It has provided another good step in the partnership between Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association and Dar Assadaqa in Abu Dis.

The young people visited Camden schools, some of which already have young links with Abu Dis. The feedback from the schools was positive, and

will strengthen the links. We are now working with Camden Local Authority to put in a bid for a British- Council-funded Connecting Classrooms project linking schools in both places. The schools that are interested in taking part are the schools whose students were involve in this visit.. This may result in later effects of the project on thousands more young people.

Adults have also been interested. For example, we have had enquiries about the possibility of visiting Abu Dis and Palestine from community centres and youth clubs who met the young people, and we hope to follow this up to build further community links.

8c 'Visibility', press and publicity,

We also publicised this project through email lists and our website. We will have reached many more people in this way. Schools and youth clubs advertised the visit and wrote about it in their newsletters, reaching hundreds more. We produced and distributed thousands of leaflets for the public events, via public libraries, community centres, schools and other organisations locally. We took out ads for the public events in the local paper for several weeks. The young people's project tee-shirts advertised the project all over the borough, and we made a photo project thank-you card to distribute after the event.

We issued press releases and contacted newspapers in both Palestine and Britain before, during and after the project. We were disappointed with the response. We are still trying to find out why the promised visits of journalists did not happen, and why the photographs that were taken by press photographers did not appear in the papers. This opportunity is not over, as we will launch the booklet and DVD in the autumn and we are seeking extra publicity at that point.

8d Additional dissemination¹

Further publicity and visibility will be achieved by the publication of the project book and DVD, which will be launched on 15th September 2009.

We will distribute copies of the book and DVD to every secondary school in Abu Dis and Camden and to participating youth clubs. We will offer the schools and youth clubs help in developing activities and further projects based on this work.

We are inviting a previous member of the European Parliament to the launch and arranging additional publicity both for the launch and for the book and DVD.

We will put the book on sale and continue to advertise it; we believe that there will be interest and that this will be just one way in which this project continues to have an effect long after the time of the actual visit.

9. Next steps

Camden Local Authority is preparing a bid for a Connecting Classrooms work with Abu Dis through the British Council. Young people in Camden will work with Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association to seek funding and to prepare for another visit of young people from Abu Dis. During the visit a number of ideas for future projects were suggested, and young people at both ends will meet again later in the summer to see if we can develop these ideas into another project.

July 2009

Appendix a - List of supporting organisations

Hampstead School
Maria Fidelis School
National Union of Teachers, Camden
St Aloysius Convent
Sisters United
Somers Town Community Centre
South Camden Community School
Southwell House Youth Project
Youth in Action (European Union)

Appendix b - Final programme

Programme for the YouthAmbassadors' for Human Rights project

Saturday 13th June - Welcome party

Sunday 14th June - Induction meeting, Camden, Hampstead Heath

Monday 15th June- Camden School, Primrose Hill School, Hampstead School International Evening

Tuesday 16th June - Gospel Oak School, tourism by the river, TWIN IMPRESSIONS exhibition

<http://www.camdenabudis.net/docs/exhibition%20opening.pdf>

Wednesday 17th June - Maria Fidelis Convent School, South Camden Community School, Imperial War Museum, Calthorpe Centre, Woodcraft Folk

Thursday 18th June- Haverstock School, Acland Burghley School, ice-skating , Euston youth club

Friday 19th June- Edith Neville School, (Regent's Park – cancelled in favour of:) visit to the Palestinian Ambassador, shopping, REFUGEE WEEK CONCERT

<http://www.camdenabudis.net/docs/concert%20leaflet%20A4.pdf>

Saturday 20th June, YOUTH ARTS WORKSHOP

<http://www.camdenabudis.net/docs/workshop%20leaflet.pdf>

Sunday 21st June - Outing to Brighton with the Woodcraft Folk

Monday 22nd - Palestinian final meeting – leave for airport